Online resource hub connects CSA farmers to expert advice

Farmer-focused software company provides free educational content for farmers running Community Supported Agriculture programs

From a Small Farm Central press release

PITTSBURGH - Small Farm Central, the leading provider of Web-based marketing solutions for small farms, has launched the “CSA Solutions Hub,” a database of resources aimed at farmers running Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs across the country. The “hub” is a virtual library of content that farmers can use freely to help build their CSA programs and connect with their members.

While Community Supported Agriculture programs have existed in North America since the early 1980s, and current numbers suggest that there are more than 6,000 farms running CSA programs in the United States, this can still be considered a niche type of farming. The availability of educational resources about running a CSA program is scattered, and farmers looking to learn from experience often have to seek out their own advisors.

Small Farm Central founder and past CSA manager Simon Huntley recognized that there was a growing need for information about CSA farming to be gathered in one place, as well as a need for new content to be created. “The CSA Solutions Hub is another way for us to help connect farmers
Center to expand resources as part of multistate project

By Christy Cassady, Extension Specialist

The Center for Crop Diversification will be expanding its reach and resources by participating in a Southern Extension and Research Activity (SERA), a multistate university Experiment Station project. The project, entitled “Crop diversification opportunities to enhance the viability of small farms,” will be a collaboration of faculty and Extension personnel from eight states – Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia.

At its launch, the content in the CSA Solutions Hub is a mixture of commonly requested resources and industry advice from other farmers and experts. In one article, Chris Blanchard, an organic farmer and a consultant with the Flying Rutabaga Works, offers his thoughts on how to deal with problems that can come up with CSA members. Another piece (a webinar hosted by Small Farm Central) covers tips for how to improve CSA member retention from season to season. Small Farm Central has plans to update the “hub” monthly with new content, focusing on resources requested by farmers and covering topics addressed in the farmer discussion group.

Interested farmers who sign up for access to the CSA Solutions Hub will receive a handful of initial emails with featured content and a link to the hub online. They will also receive a monthly email highlighting what’s new to the hub as well as exclusive invitations to educational webinars and meetups with CSA farmers and experts. View current content and sign up for the CSA Solutions Hub on the Small Farm Central’s Member Assembler website.

To join the CSA Farmer Discussion Group, visit: http://www.facebook.com/groups/306541762795660/ and log in to your Facebook account.
through this project. Opportunities for cooperative programs on crop diversification topics will also be enhanced by participation in the project.

Project objectives include conducting applied research on several crops that have potential to be profitable for small farms; coordinating research and Extension activities among participants, including development and presentation of webinars, videos and print publications on crop production and marketing; expanding the activities of the Center for Crop Diversification to include farmers market, produce auction and other price reports from the participating states; and conducting market research in the participating states on consumer preferences and marketing channels that are most effective and profitable for small farms. We will share details about specific crops and activities that will be part of the project as they are developed.

### Podcasts feature crop successes

Over the past year, the Center for Crop Diversification has been collecting success stories from Kentucky producers about some of the crops that have worked for them. We have six available on our website (http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/intro.html) as well as on the University of Kentucky iTunesU account at http://itunes.uky.edu. Once you sign in, you’ll be directed to the main UK iTunes page, then you need to click on “College of Agriculture,” then click on “Center for Crop Diversification.” Available podcasts are:

**Brandon Reece** from Reece Farms talks about the peppers he grows in Clark County, Kentucky, and how he has created valued-added pepper products. Candied jalapeños are their best seller.

**Scott Eidson** from Revolutionary Hop Farm in Carter County, Kentucky, talks about the emerging hops industry in Kentucky and the newly formed Kentucky Hop Growers Alliance.

**Molly Stotts** from My Father’s Garden in Clark County, Kentucky, shares information about production of organic potatoes and organic garlic. She shares information on varieties and how to store these crops.

**Trudie Reed** of Reed Valley Orchard in Paris, Kentucky, talks about growing blackberries in Kentucky and their U-pick operation, as well as other marketing avenues the orchard uses.

**Larry Martin** of the Kentucky Blueberry Growers Association in Metcalfe County talks about growing blueberries in Kentucky, the marketing efforts of the KBGA as a whole, as well as their business with the Kentucky Farm to School program.

University of Kentucky Agricultural Economics Extension Professor **Steve Isaacs** discusses his experiences growing and marketing three varieties of table grapes in Woodford County, Kentucky.

### 2014 Kentucky apple crop update

**By John Strang, UK Extension Fruit Specialist**

The 2014 growing season in Kentucky was challenging for most fruit growers. The first polar vortex of the year dropped temperatures from 54°F on January 5 to -5.2°F on January 6 in the Lexington area. Temperatures were not as severe in western Kentucky. A spring freeze on the morning of April 16 caused additional damage, particularly in central and eastern Kentucky. Fruit crop percentages were very difficult to determine.
because of the crop variability across the state. Fruit sales were generally good for most growers. Kentucky growers produced an apple crop that averaged 70% of normal due to the April freeze and biennial bearing on some varieties. Growers in central and eastern Kentucky experienced the most crop loss from frost, while western Kentucky had essentially no frost injury and produced full crops. Fruit size was large where trees were adequately thinned and fruit color was excellent.

Moderate to high levels of cedar apple rust were observed on leaves and fruit. Fire blight was very severe in central and eastern Kentucky orchards. Frogeye leaf spot, sooty blotch and fly speck were also very common. Bitter rot was the main summer rot. Oriental fruit moth remains a serious problem in some central Kentucky orchards. Codling moth levels fluctuated substantially between orchards.

**Learning opportunities**

The following events are coming up in November, December and January. Check out these learning opportunities!

**Kentucky Small, Limited Resource, Minority Farmers Conference,** November 18-20, Capital Plaza Hotel/Kentucky State University/KSU Research Farm, Frankfort. This year’s theme is “Celebrating the Past; Looking for the Future.” For more information, contact Louie Rivers at 502-597-6327 or louie.rivers@kysu.edu.

**Basic Horticulture Production and Wine Tasting,** December 3, University of Kentucky Research and Education Center, 1205 Hopkinsville Street, Princeton, KY. 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. CST. $15 to register. Topics to be covered: container production of woody plants, irrigation systems, life cycle assessment for horticulture industries, fruit production overview. There will be time for growers to talk with university specialists about their own growing problems. The day will end with a wine program and wine tasting. Limited to 30 participants. For more information, contact Winston Dunwell, 270.365.7541 x 209, or wdunwell@uky.edu.

**No-Till and Cover Crop Soil Health Forum.** The Bluegrass Chapter of the Soil & Water Conservation Society (SWCS), the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will host a no-till cover crop soil health forum from 9:30 a.m. to noon (CST) on December 17 at the UK Research and Education Center in Princeton.

Leaders in no-till and cover crop farming will discuss the benefits, opportunities and challenges associated with improving the health and function of their soils through the adoption of soil health management systems. Five Kentucky farmers will be featured. This forum will provide a unique opportunity for farmers interested in using cover crops in no-till farming operations to ask the panel about their experiences. **Please RSVP by November 30th** to Steve Blanford at 859-224-7607. For more information, go to https://www.morningagclips.com/no-till-and-cover-crop-soil-health-forum/?PageSpeed=noscript.

The 2015 **Kentucky Fruit and Vegetable Conference** will be held January 5-6 at Embassy Suites in Lexington. The registration fee of $40 includes a year’s membership in the Kentucky Vegetable Growers Association, Kentucky State Horticultural Society, or Organic Association of Kentucky, or entrance into the Grape & Wine Short Course. Check the Center for Crop Diversification Events page at http://www.uky.edu/ag/CCD/events.html for the conference program and registration form.

**Subscribe!**

Thanks for reading, and please contact Miranda at miranda.hileman@uky.edu if you are interested in subscribing to our online newsletter.